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ERNAKULAM DISTRICT

TOTAL LITERACY PROJECT

A REPORT

Kerala Sastra Sahithya Parishad

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KERALA SASTRA SAHITHYA PARISHAD

Ernakulam has achieved the distinction of being the first fully literate district in India. Of the 25 lakh people between the age group 5 to 60 in the district, 98.5 % are today literate. This has been achieved through a massive literacy campaign - "lead kindly light" - launched on the 26th of January 1989. This was, perhaps the biggest, ever campaign mounted in the district. More than twenty thousand instructors and tens of thousands of organizers took part in this campaign which extended over a period of one year. Each one of them would have spent, on an average, 400 - 500 hours for this campaign, without any monetary reward. The joy of doing something which has to be done was their only reward.

Ernakulam was one of the most literate districts in the state. However, even here, it was estimated that the number of illiterates in the age group 5 to 60 would be about 1.50 lakhs. A field survey held on March 18, 1989, raised this figure to 1.85 lakhs. This was, later, proved to be an over estimation. The actual number was around 1.70 lakhs. Of this, around 1.61 lakh people got themselves enrolled in the 20000 and odd literacy centres in the district. Among them about 1.3 to 1.4 lakh people have now become fully literate.

'Lead kindly light' is a project entrusted to Kerala Sastra Sahithya Parishad by the National Literacy Mission. In 1985 November, during a National Workshop on "Challenge of Education" KSSP mooted the idea of Total Literacy in Kerala within five years. Later, in the next year, a draft project to make Kerala fully literate was submitted to the Central Education Secretary. That was before the establishment of the N L M

The idea of a campaign for total literacy in the Ernakulam district was supported by Shri. K.R. Rajan Collector of Ernakulam and former vice president of KSSP. A draft project proposal was prepared by him with the help of his senior colleagues, especially Ms. Rose, the District planning officer. Leaders of KSSP, together with Shri. Rajan had preliminary discussions with the Education Secretary and officials of National Literacy Mission and they expressed their willingness to fund the project provided KSSP takes the responsibility. KSSP, accordingly, went through the draft project proposal and made through revisions in it and submitted to MHRD in July 1988. The project was approved in september 1988.

As per the usual norms of the NLM, the cost of making 1.50 lakh persons literate would have been Rs. 181 lakhs. But Ernakulam project was sanctioned for Rs. 80 lakhs. It became abundantly clear that unless bulk of the work is done voluntarily, this project cannot be executed.

An Ernakulam District Literacy Council was registered, in the meanwhile, with the District collector as chairman. This council was formally entrusted with the responsibility of running the project. Further, a broad based people's committee with Justice. V.R. Krishna Iyer as chair person, too was formed to support the programme.

A three faceted organizational machinery was envisaged for the actual execution of the project. This consisted of:

a) The government network headed by the District Collector.
b) The project office network consisting of the project officers and other full time personnel.
c) People's network, with Kerala Sastra Sahithya Parishat as its back bone.

KSSP released a substantial number of its most active and efficient workers to work both in the project office and in the field.

A detailed programme of action was then drawn up. One thing was clear from the very beginning. An ever rising tempo has to be maintained. An extraordinary environment has to be created in order to throw up thousands of voluntary instructors and also to break the diffidence and reticence

of the would be learners. A detailed environment creation plan was chalked out. This involved padayatras, Kalajathas, Cinema slides, stickers, posters, banners, hoardings, literacy walls etc. An academic committee consisting of KSSP nominees and nominees of the State Resource Centre was at work to produce the necessary teaching and learning materials. All the required primers, work books and Teachers guides were made available in record time.

The third leg of the action plan was the building up of the delivery organizations. The District collector held, literally hundreds of meetings of his officers, panchayat presidents, executive officers, political leaders, organization leaders, religious leaders, anganwadi workers etc etc. The KSSP and other organisations too organized hundreds of meetings at panchayath and ward levels to mobilize field support and recruit volunteer instructors.

The project office was set up with 4 project officers, and 4 Assistant Project Officers at the head quarters and 20 Assistant Project Officers at the 20 subproject areas. They were recruited on deputation (without any special allowance) from among government and non government employees. A good many of these were active KSSP workers. This project office has never been locked from outside! It worked round the clock throughout the year.

The project was formally inaugurated on 26th January 1989 by Sri. E. K. Nayanar, Chief Minister. As a percursor to this, on 23rd, January a Literacy Torch was ceremonially lit by Sri. S. Krishnakumar, then State Minister for Information and Broadcasting. KSSP organized on 21st January five padayatras, starting from five corners of the district and converging at Cochin on 26th January 1989. This was the curtain raiser. People got the first exposure to the forthcoming campaign through this. Subsequently block level, panchayat level and ward level conventions were organized and committees constituted. Dy. Collectors, Tahsildars, Block Development Officers, panchayat executive officers, village officers all were assigned responsibilities by the Collector. They were to function as convenors of literacy samithis at different levels. The KSSP and other

organizations provided at least one joint convenor at each level. The BDC chairman, panchayat presidents and ward members functioned as chairmen at appropriate levels Squads were formed in each ward. On 18th March 1989, a massive survey to locate the coordinates of each and every potential learner was planned. 80% of the six lakh households in the district were surveyed on that day. About 50,000 volunteers participated in this survey. Besides giving the names and addresses of each and every illiterate in the district, this announced the literacy programme in the most effective way, to each and ever household. By this time, posters, banners and hoardings began to appear in thousands, all over the district.

In the mean time the academic group has been working. A special book for the learners titled AKSHARAM (The letter) was prepared. A hand book for teachers too was made. Further, seven additional reading books for the teachers were planned. Two work books for learners too were prepared. Training took place in March, April and May. About 1000 master trainers and about 20000 instructors (out of which around 12000 were women) were trained. Most of the project personnel were not optimistic about the availability of voluntary instructors. But even the most optimistic were pleasantly susprised to find the inflow of volunteers. The youth of Ernakulam district, especially girls, took the programme as theirs and there was no need to worry any more. However, there were still some wards in some areas which were short of instructors in comparison to the number of illiterates. Additional volunteers were enlisted from these areas.

Propaganda continued ceaselessly. From 15th of April to 25th of April 20 teams of artists and activists of KSSP and other organizations travelled to every nook and corner of this district, gave performances and spoke about the Total Literacy Programme at more than 1000 places. Thousands of posters were displayed. Individuals and organizations sponsored stickers. Banners and hoardings could be seen every where. Newspaper's published reports and features. The atmosphere of the entire district was surcharged with the call for literacy. It is this surcharged environment that generated the volunteers and encouraged the learners. Experience taught that this environment has to be constantly maintained. Even

training programmes were used for environment creation. There were 7 master trainers camps and 20 instructor's camps. In all the places local arrangements including food were fully looked after by the community. Collection of money and materials for these camps itself served as good propoganda.

After the initial round of enrolment was over and classes become stable it was found that about 20 to 30% of the would be learners are still outside the classes. In order to persuade them to join literacy classes padayatras were conducted in each and every ward or division. This was done on the 8th of July. One more round of posters. Again on 10th of August, children of all the schools in the district took the literacy pledge and went round in jathas in the neighbourhood. In September the International Literacy Day was celebrated in an unprecedented manner. KSSP organized two padayatras starting from morthern and southern ends of Kerala. These padayatras greeted the learners and instructors of the Ernakulam district and also called upon the entire state to become fully literate. In Ernakulam district a massive art festival and competition was organized for the neoliterates. More than 70,000 of them participated in the panchayat and project area level competitions and nearly 700 in the district level competition held on 8th September at Cochin. About 25000 neoliterates participated in the massive procession held on that day.

The learners were determined to learn and the instructors were excited to teach. It was an exciting and refreshing experience to them. To majority of the instructors, unemployed girls and boys this was a liberating occasion – liberation from pessimism, liberation from the sense of being unwanted, liberation from inactivity. More than two thirds of the instructors were women. After the initial training they were given two more refresher courses. By and large, the learners wanted straight away to learn, writing and reading. They were sufficiently motivated. Contrary to the fears of traditional adult educators, it was found that science based lessons on geography and astronomy invoked maximum curiosity among the learners and led to interesting discussions.

Nearly half the learners were above the age of forty and had poor eyesight. This was a major obstacle in their learning process. Realising this, a bold decision to provide spectacles to them was taken. About seventy thousand persons were provided with spectacles costing about Rs. 10 lakhs. Half of this amount came from donations and from the state government. The other half was taken out of the project funds. This itself become a major side line operation in the literacy programme.

'Proof of the pudding lies in eating' - says the proverb. Have the learners become really literate? Strict and honest evaluation had to be made. Elaborate arrangements were made for this. Both internel and externel evaluation was carried out. Of the 1.6 lakh persons initially enrolled, more than 80 percent have already achieved literacy levels higher than those prescribed by the NLM. Of the remaining, about 10 % are late starters and are expected to make the grade soon.

The Rural Functional Literacy Projects and SAEP were the two major literacy efforts till now, at least in this state. Under these schemes the total cost of a project, to make 1.6 lakh persons literate, would have been about Rs. 2½ crores. As against this, the National Literacy Mission gave only Rs. 80 lakh to run the Ernakulam project. It was the tens of thousands of volunteers who come forward as instructors that made this project possible. The credit of this success goes primarily to them.

A very novel feature of 'Lead Kindly Light' was the massive involvement of government officials from collector down to village officers. In no other development activity such a massive and committed involvement of government officials has ever taken place. This has considerably increased people's confidence in them. The salutory effects of this confidence will become visible in other areas of developmental activities too. It is the sacrifice, committment and hard work on the part of the instructors and activists of voluntary organizations that made it. If one could value their efforts, at a modest rate of Rs. 5 per hour, it would run into Rs. 5 to 6 crores. With them and among them were hundreds and thousands of activists from various

voluntary groups. Over these months a new model for literacy campaign has emerged. The essential features of this model are:

1. Massiveness - minimum size one district
2. Voluntariness - Emotional attachment to literacy work.
3. Involvement of people's organizations - Massive - broad base.
4. Massive involvement of government officials, in a committed manner, besides their normal responsibilities.
5. A healthy integration between people's organizations and governmental machinery
6. A well structured and well oiled implementation machinery working '24 hours a day'.
7. Intensive environment building and maintainence.

The long term relevence of Ernakulam experience is much more than what it appears to be. The inspiration and enthusiasm that radiates from the Ernakulam achievement, would spread to the entire length and breadth of the country. It is sure to provide a powerful weapon to do away with the massive illiteracy which is haunting the nation.

We are so happy about the decision of the government of Kerala to extend the Ernakulam experience throughout the state. We use this opportunity to declare our wholehearted co-operation to make it a success.

The organizational network built up for literacy by fusing both the formal governmental and informal peoples organization into it, will be useful in multifarious developmental activities and in solving people's problems. It would become, we hope, a firm foundation for a truly democratic society with the active, creative and scientific participation of the people in administration and development.

People's Science Movements involved in literacy work for the first time through Kerala Sastra Sahithya Parishad. This has paid rich dividents. We have learned that literacy work can be combined with the development of a scientific and optimistic world out look. This, according to us, is the

greatest lesson to be learned from the Ernakulam Total Literacy Project.

We, the members of KSSP, feel extremly happy and proud about our close association with the Ernakulam Project. During past one year, we have learned somuch from the people. We have immensly enjoyed working with the committed youth who, with their enormous capacity for selfless and hard work made this historic achievement possible. We have enjoyed working with the collector, officials of the administration and our brothers and sisters in the various government departments who could break the shells of lethargy normally found in routine government acitivity. We are thankful to all voluntary and mass organizations who supported and stood with us. We thank the intellectuals, experts, mediamen and political leaders who showered us with help and encouragement. We are greatful to the local boadies and their leaders for their unending interest and support without which the massive literacy network would not have been possible. We are thankful to the people of Ernakulam District who considered it as their own programme. We are thankful to the NLM officials and Ministry of Human Resources development for their confidence in KSSP and for their guidence.

May we, the members of KSSP, use this opportunity to greet each and every one of you who have blessed this great occassion with your gracious presence.

Once again, we thank allthose who, through hard work and unrelenting committment to the society made this historic achievement a reality.

KERALA SASTHRA SAHITHYA PARISHAD

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